

Reforming Environmental Governance: What Role can the Superpower Play?

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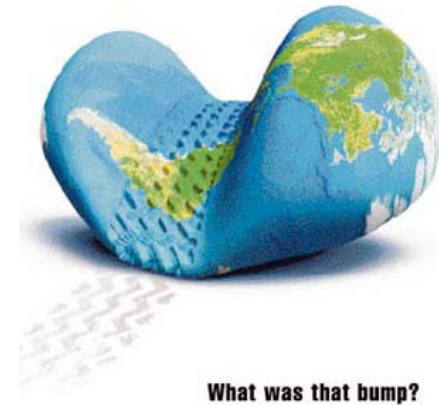




Outline

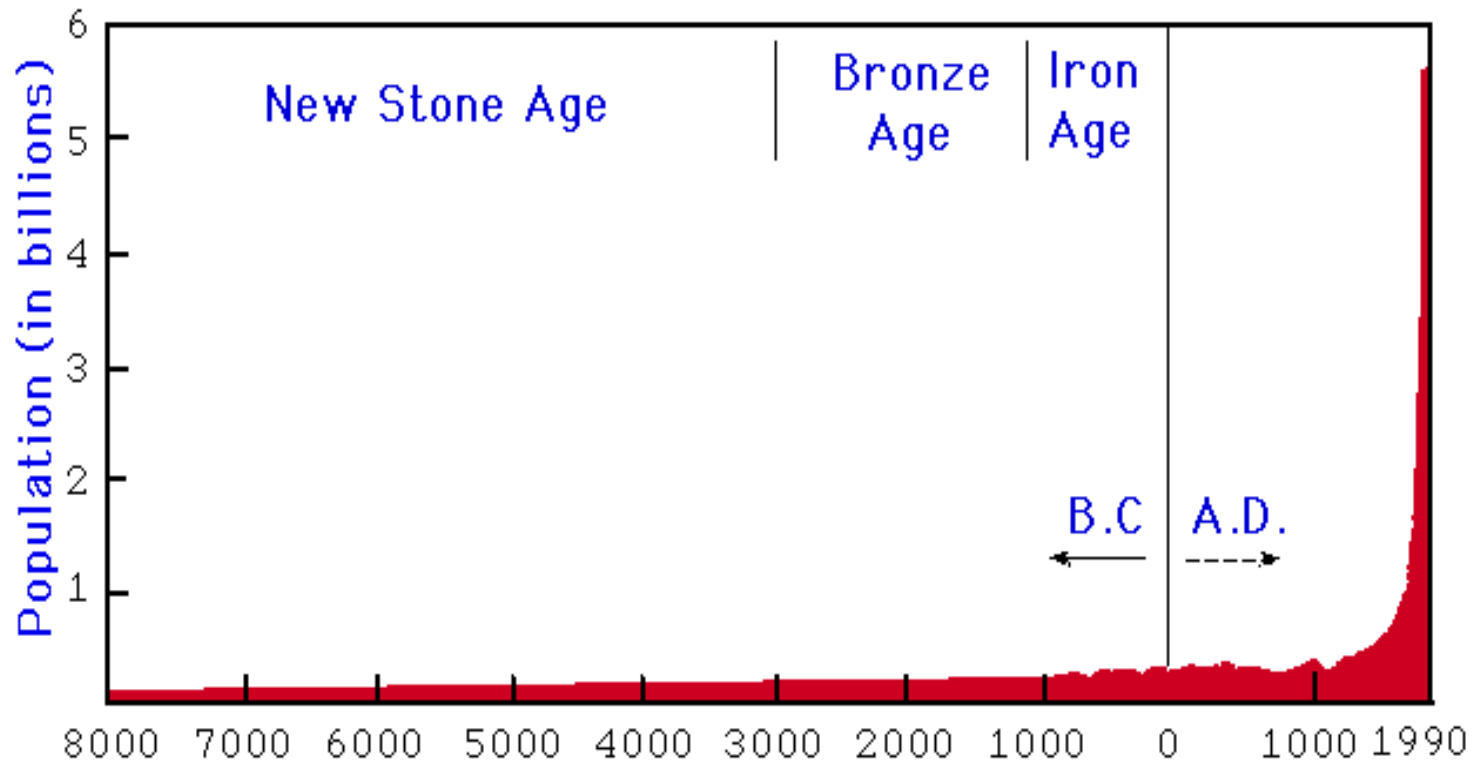
1. The global ecological crisis
2. Reforming global environmental governance
3. The case for green states
4. Role of US: from superpower to solar power?

Why do we have a crisis?



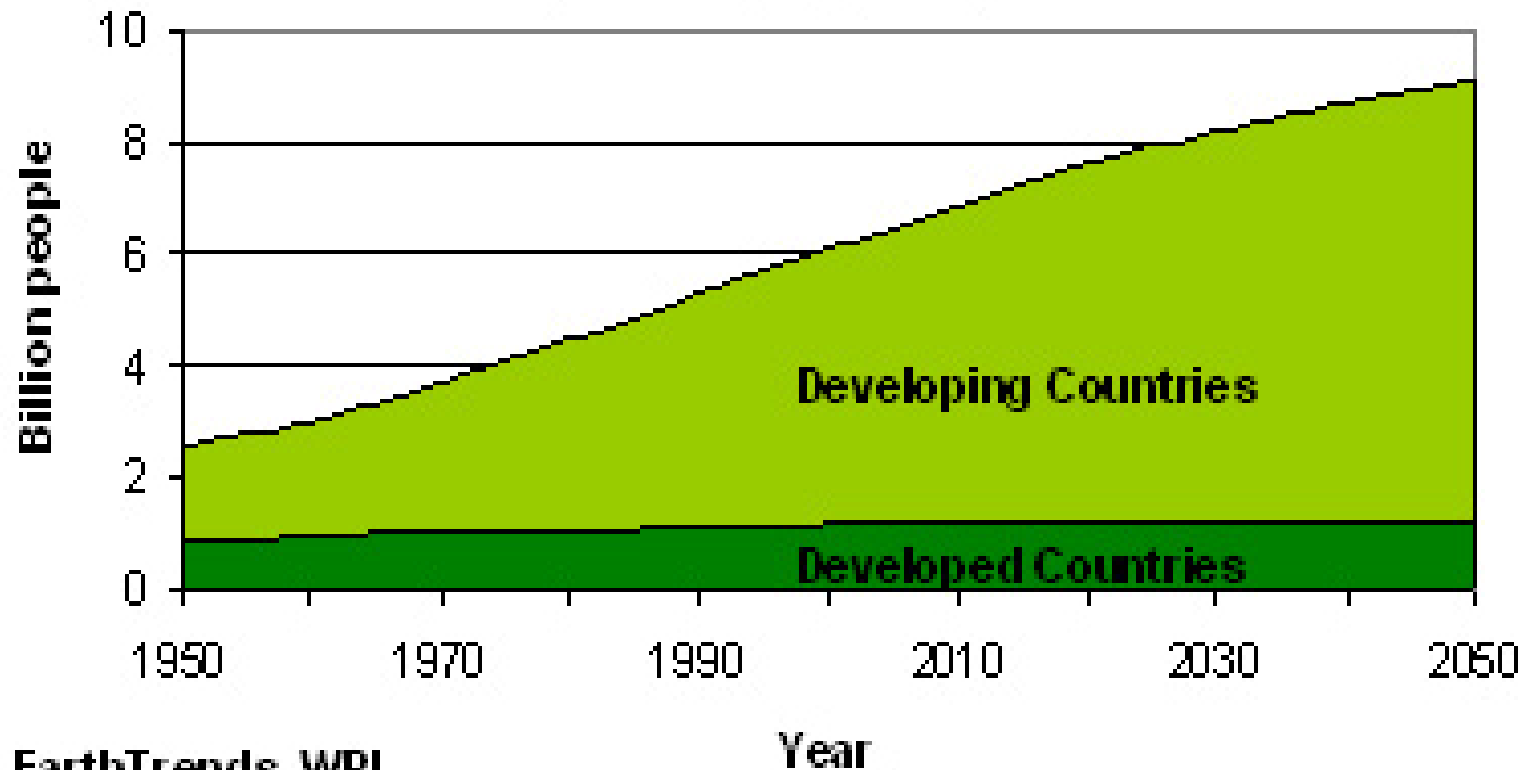
- Exponential population growth
- Intensification of economic globalisation in a neoliberal capitalist form; rising consumption
- Rapid technological developments and rise of technocratic rationality
- Anarchic state system; state rivalry

World Population: the long view



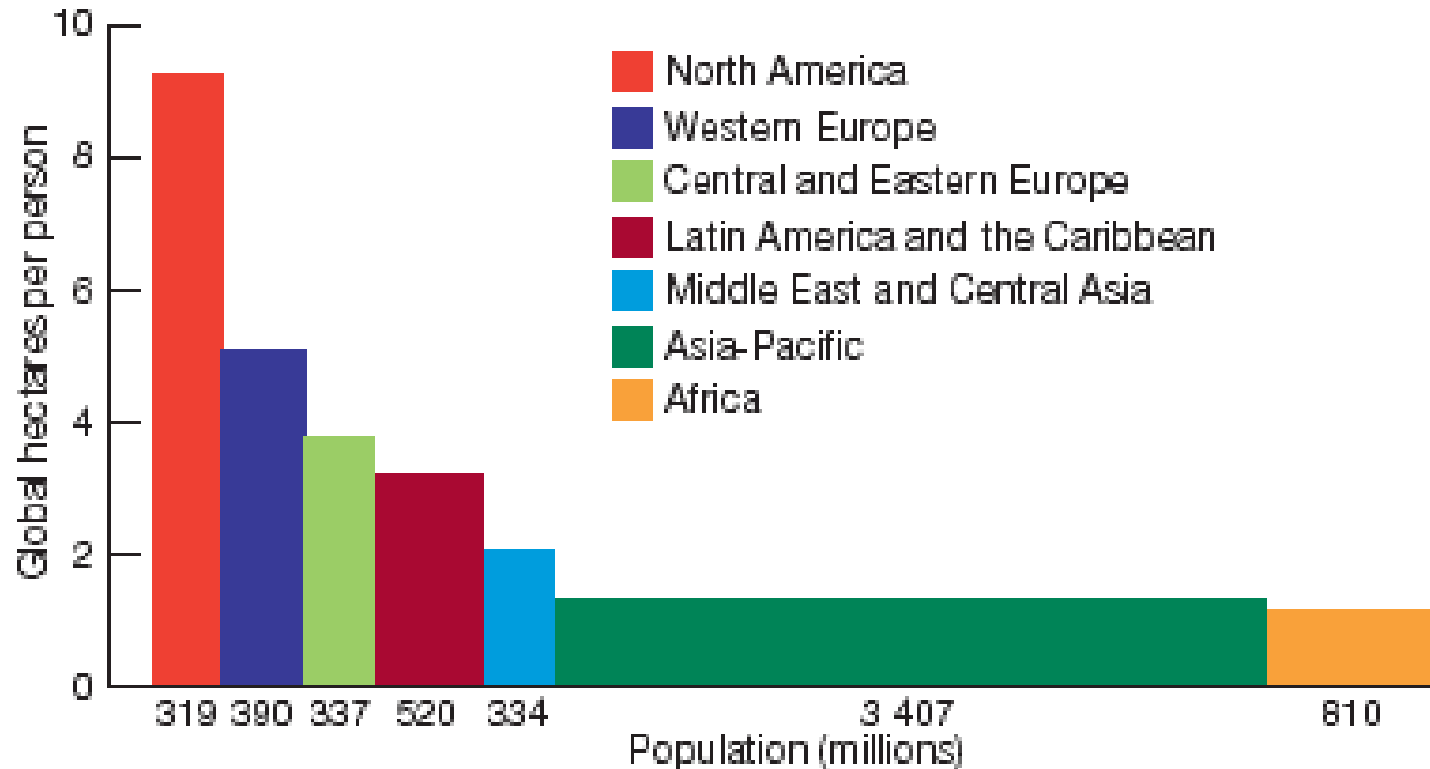
World Population: the near view

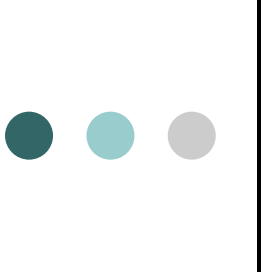
World Population Growth: 1950-2050
(medium projection)



Ecological Footprint by Region 2001

(Source: Global Footprint Network)





Key features of the ecological crisis

- **Skewed distribution of environmental goods and bads/risks**

Over-consumption and improved domestic environments in the Global North

Under-consumption and environmental degradation of domestic environments in the Global South

- **A crisis of accountability**

Inverse relationship between responsibility and vulnerability/capacity to adapt



Profoundly uneven development

The global North

pursues the myth of decoupling through
more environmentally efficient growth

The global South

pursues the myth of 'catching-up' by
following the EKC

Both myths perpetuate *unequal ecological
exchange* between North and South



The sustainability paradox

- States are the primary vehicles for creating sustainability parameters, redistributing income, disciplining markets and negotiating treaties
- Yet all governments feel compelled to pursue economic growth (and further destroy the environment) in order to generate the wealth and capacity to pursue sustainable development and redistribution

No country in the world is on a fully sustainable trajectory!



We need green states

Type of state	Econ/Env Relationship	Society	Democracy
Neo-liberal state	Relative decoupling	Maldistribution	Liberal democracy
Welfare state	Relative decoupling	Fair distribution	Social democracy
Green state	Absolute decoupling	Fair distribution	Ecological democracy



Green states: key features

- Politicisation and democratisation of parameters for investment, production and consumption to ensure accountability to affected publics
- Sustainability parameters a condition for, rather than restraint upon, human freedom
- Expanded environmental constituency; flexible demos
- Experimentation with new institutions of representation and accountability
- Transnational states



How are green states (and societies) created?

- **Bottom-up political mobilisation**

green parties and movements/NGOs/local govts plus voluntary citizens experiments and new corporate initiatives (CSR; ecolabelling, consumer boycotts; local cooperatives etc.)

- **Horizontal integration**

emulation of new legislative models, policies and instruments – demonstration effect

- **Vertical integration**

environmental multilateralism (e.g. int'l treaties, declarations, action plans)



Ongoing Problems with Environmental Treaty System

- Ad hoc, problem-specific, reactive rather than proactive
- Negotiations too slow, complex and cumbersome, lowest common denominator agreements
- Voluntarist (no state can be forced to cooperate)
- Unequal influence and negotiating power among states
- States only recognised actors; Weak lines of accountability to civil society, even in democratic states
- Overshadowed by institutions of global economic governance (the WTO, World Bank and IMF) – no global integration of economic and environmental governance



Proposed reforms to global environmental governance

- World Environment Organisation
- A World Constitution for Environmental Justice
- A citizens chamber in the United Nations, or a World Environment Council represented by citizens rather than states
- An Ecological Security Council
- A World Environment Court



Catch-22

- None of these reforms can proceed without agreement among a critical mass of states
- So where to start?



Which states?

- The world's 192 states are juridically equal, but effectively unequal (cf. great powers, middle powers, small states, weak and failed states)
- Historically, great powers have been the key architects of international order
- Cooperation of great powers is also essential to success of environmental multilateralism



Why the US?

- No green transformation in any other single country can make a bigger global difference – except perhaps China, yet US carries a bigger moral responsibility to take the lead according to CDR
- An environmental pioneer in the 1970s (but an environmental laggard today)
- New administration willing to re-engage with multilateralism



1970s – US an environmental leader

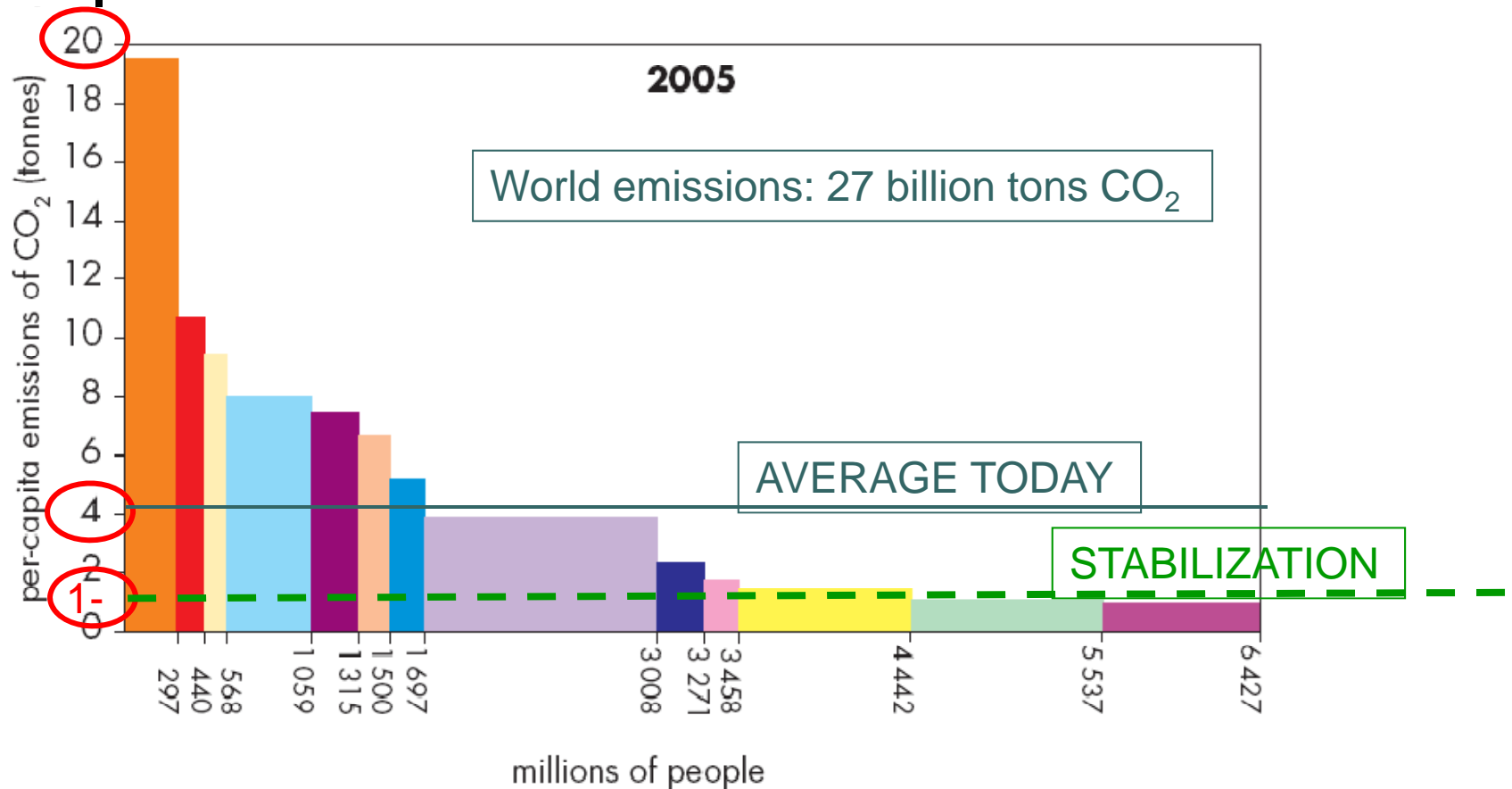
- Strong environment movement; active civil society (e.g. Earth Day 1970)
- Creative Congress - enacted pioneering environmental legislation, served as a model for other countries
- Active environmental diplomacy; supported UNEP at Stockholm; proactive on whaling, endangered species protection

1990s and 2000s – US an environmental laggard

- world's biggest ecological footprint
- World's biggest historical and per capita carbon emitter
- Declined to ratify major MEAs

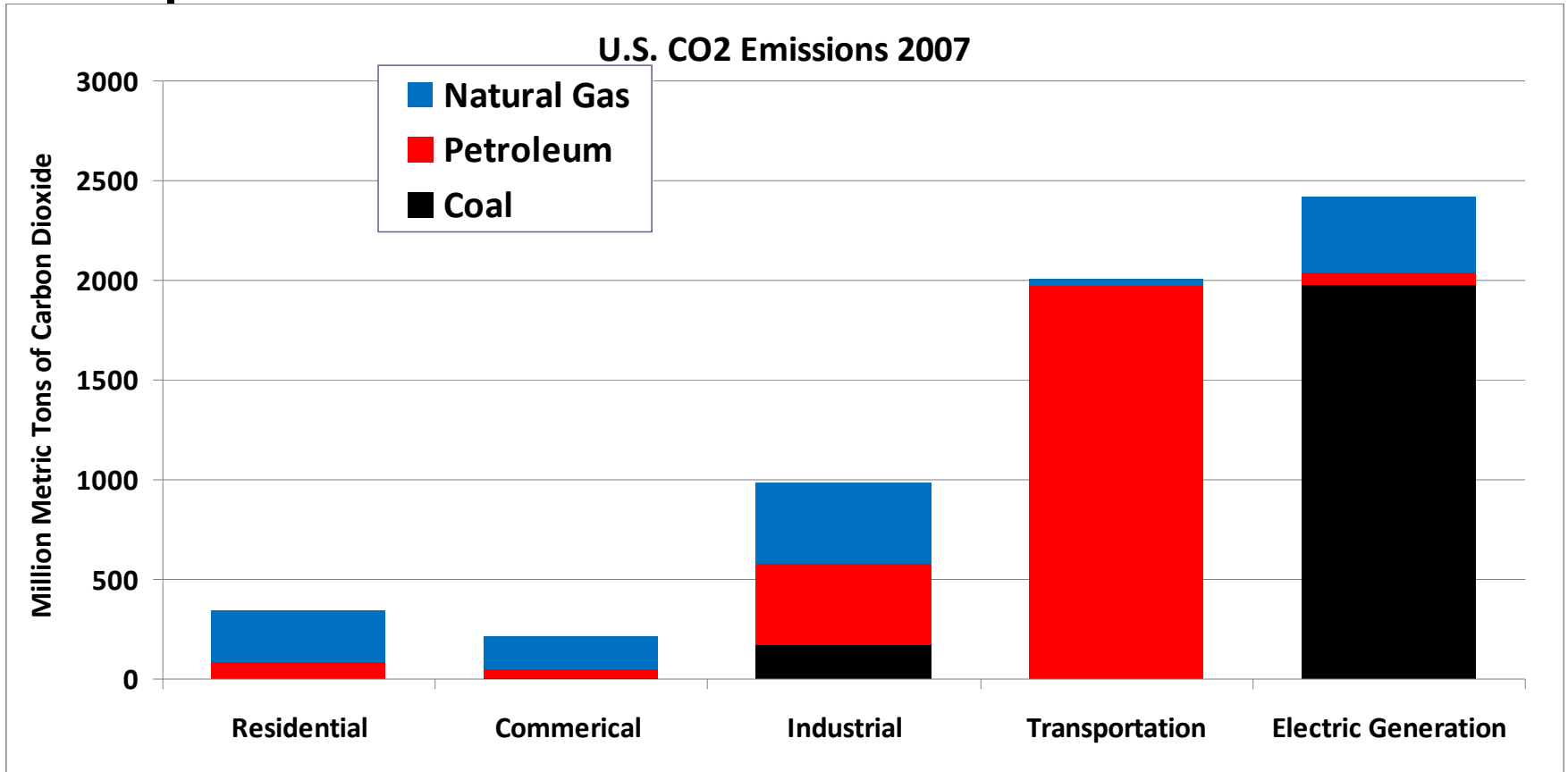


Per-capita fossil-fuel CO₂ emissions, 2005



- US
 Russia
 Japan
 EU
 Other OECD
 Middle East
- Other transition economies
 China
 Other Latin America
 Brazil
- Rest of Asia
 India
 Africa

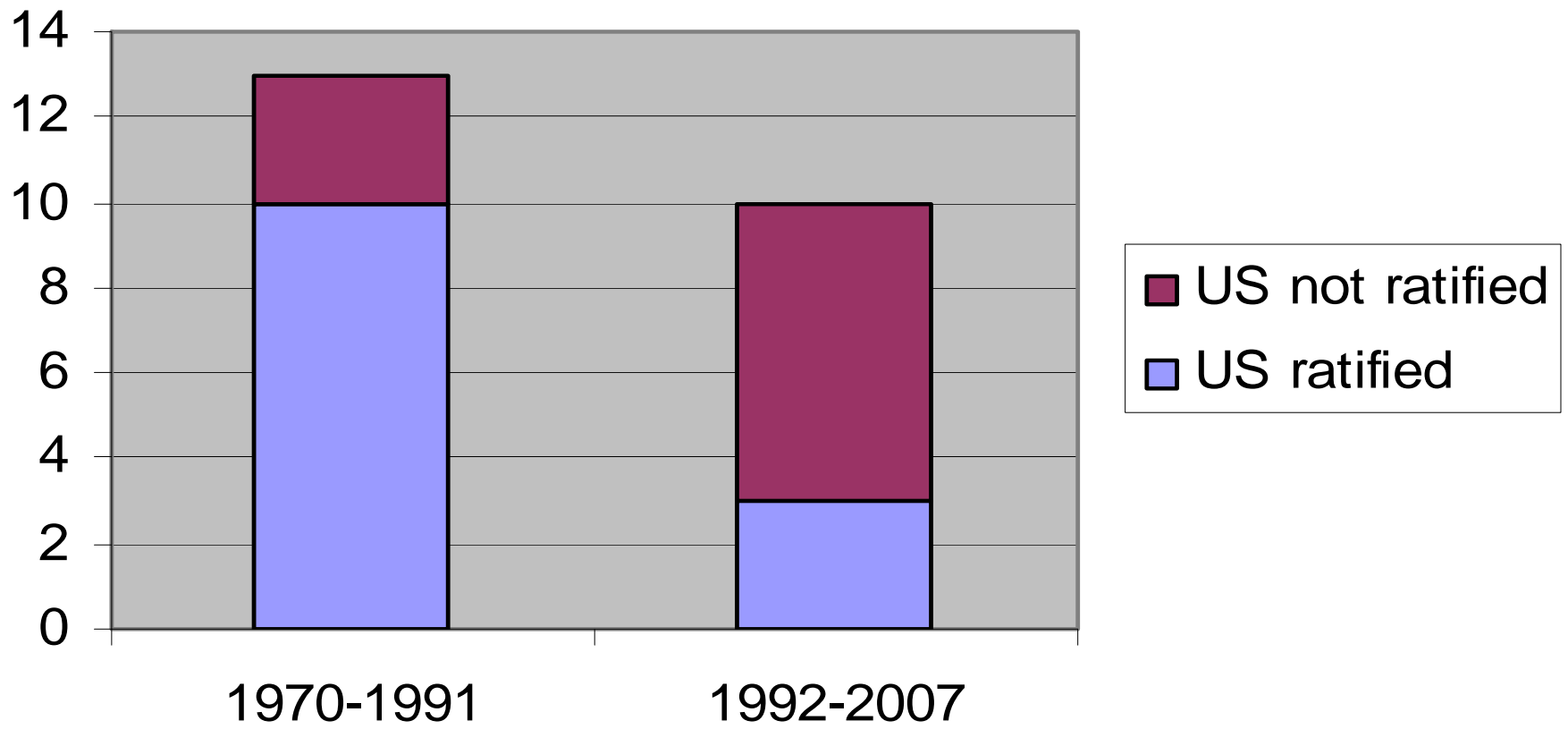
U.S. Fossil-fuel CO₂ emissions



U.S. total emissions: 6.0 billion tons CO₂

Source: UNEP Environmental Treaty Register

Figure 1: Proportion of environmental treaties ratified by the US





Why the shift?

- New status as the sole superpower since 1992; more unilateralist options
- A series of anti-environmental Presidents (especially Bush Jr) and/or hostile Congress; fragmented political system
- Environment considered a matter of 'low politics' by US executive; new competition with China for world's dwindling supply of oil
- Aggressive anti-environmental lobbying by fossil fuel interests; weakened environmental movement
- Post-Cold War environmental treaties much more confronting to US style capitalism and US grand strategy



US Grand Strategy since 1946

Key planks

- Maintenance of US military supremacy
- Dominance of US economy and US dollar (despite GFC)
- Promotion of liberal democracy

This strategy has increasingly constrained US domestic and foreign environment policy

- US military is the world's biggest consumer of oil
- US capitalism built on cheap fossil fuels
- helps to explain a supply-driven foreign petroleum policy and absence of aggressive renewable policy and domestic energy demand management



Rethinking US grand strategy

Security

- Needs to be recalibrated according to the requirements of human and environmental security
- Energy security - renewables and concerted demand management to replace fossil fuel

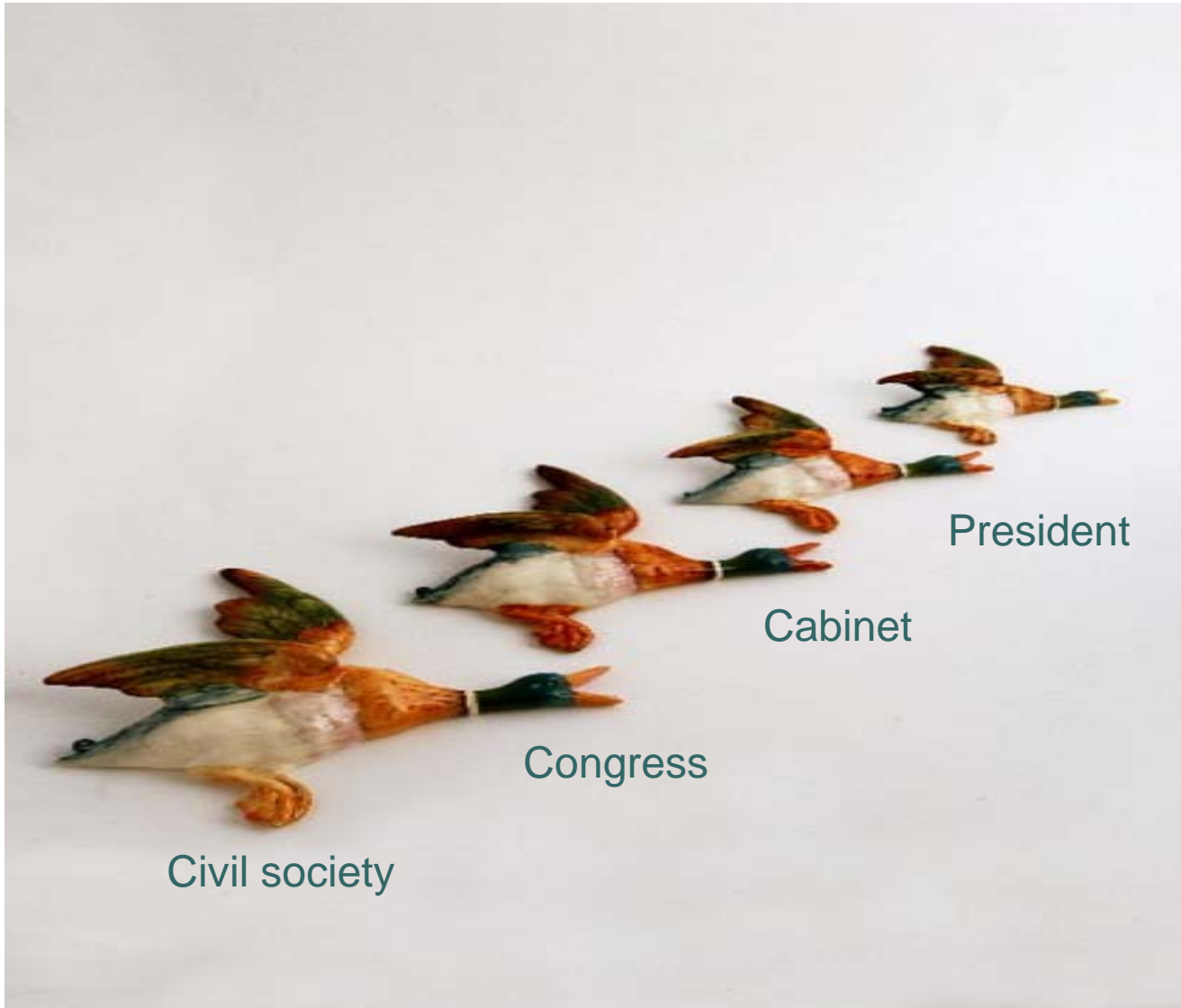
Economy

- neoliberalism needs to give way to socially and ecologically embedded markets; not just Green New Deal
- Free trade must give way to fair trade
- Genuine progress indicator to replace GDP as proxy for wellbeing

International Polity

- Unilateralism and quest for supremacy needs to give way to a rule-based order; 'complex multilateralism' and common but differentiated responsibilities

The 'flying duck theory' of US environmental leadership



● ● ● | Yes, he can (but not on his own)

